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Pharyngeal gonorrhoea: the forgotten reservoir

Urethral gonorrhoea (UG) dramatically decreased in Paris between 1986 and 1997 as a consequence of safer sexual behaviour. Thus, only 43 cases of gonorrhoea have been collected in our clinic in 1997, the lowest number since the early 1970s. Since 1998, an increase has been observed, as in other STD clinics in France and in the Renago laboratory network.[1–3] Men who have sex with men (MSMs) represent an increasing number of men with UG. Many of them are HIV seropositive and recognise unprotected oral sex as the only risk factor for gonorrhoea. This finding prompted us to study pharyngeal carriage of *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* (NG) and *Neisseria meningitidis* (NM) in this population.

From January 1999 to May 2001, 200 consecutive cases of male UG were observed in our clinic; a pharyngeal smear for culture of NG and NM was suggested as well as a standardised questionnaire aimed at sexual behaviour; 178 gave informed consent. Results are presented in table 1, comparing MSMs and men who also have sex with women (MSWs).

Interestingly, MSMs represent more than 50% of patients with UG (compared to 10% in 1986 and 20% in 1995). One third of them are HIV seropositive (a minimal figure because of a high rate, 9%, of test refusal). Fifty eight per cent admitted unprotected oral sex as the sole risk factor for gonorrhoea. Moreover, 98% of the gonococci cultured in MSMs are serogroup W-2–3 (*v* 73 % in MSWs) and only 1/92 produce penicillinase (*v* 26 % in MSWs), suggesting a homogeneous cluster of strains circulating in the Paris gay community (study ongoing). Finally, pharyngeal carriage of both NG (14%) and NM (20%) is high.

Data concerning MSWs are heterogeneous, UG affects mainly male patients from north (35%) and central (31%) Africa, with oral sex as the only risk factor for gonorrhoea (10%), and pharyngeal carriage of NG and NM (6%) is much lower, but not inconsistent.

Pharyngeal gonorrhoea is mostly asymptomatic (all our cases were) and bacteriological diagnosis is uncertain, but we believe that the pharynx acts as an important reservoir accounting for the recent increase in UG, particularly in MSMs using unprotected oral sex as an alleged safer sex act. The high proportion of HIV infected patients is a major cause of concern and information about the hazards of unprotected oral sex is warranted.

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Emerging of dual AIDS associated neoplastic diseases in the era of highly active antiretroviral therapy

Kaposi's sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and cervical cancer remain the only AIDS associated malignancies, according to the 1993 CDC definition, but other neoplasms were reported throughout AIDS pandemic (Hodgkin's lymphoma, oropharyngeal, oesophageal, gastric, anal, lung, and brain cancer, testicular-ovarian neoplasms, melanoma, skin and thyroid malignancies, multiple myeloma, leiomyosarcomas, angiosarcomas, smooth muscle tumours), with an increasing frequency despite HAART introduction.[1–4]

Among 711 AIDS patients notified since 1985, 66 (9.3%) were diagnosed because of an AIDS defining cancer, and 51 more patients (7.2%) developed a malignancy with AIDS, but dual AIDS associated neoplasms were never seen until 2000. A rare combination of lethal Kaposi's sarcoma plus non-Hodgkin's lymphoma was recently observed. Two homo/bisexual men had received multiple antiretroviral lines since 1990–2, but complete viral suppression was achieved by the first patient for a limited 6 month period, while elevated viraemia (with peaks of 210 000 and 270 000 HIV-RNA copies/ml, respectively), lasted for the past 5 years. An appreciable degree of HIV related immunodeficiency was expressed by a CD4+ count of 42–255 cells × 10^6/l in the first patient, and 68–355 cells × 10^6/l in the second case. A first AIDS related neoplasm (a cutaneous-mucous Kaposi's sarcoma), was identified 2 and 5 years before death, respectively. Repeated cytotoxic treatment with adriablastine-bleomycin-vincristine, followed by liposomal daunorubicin, reduced disease progression, while a number of HIV related opportunistic infections occurred: oesophageal candidiasis and cryptosporidiasis in the first patient, and pneumonia, zoster, plus wasting syndrome in the second subject. Eleven and 5 months before the lethal outcome, respectively, a Burkitt's B cell lymphoma involving multiple skin sites and complicated by bone marrow, gastroduodenal, gingivobuccal, and pulmonary localisations was detected in the first patient, while the second subject had a high grade non-Hodgkin's lymphoma involving axillary-mediastinal lymph nodes, lungs, and pleura. Notwithstanding therapeutic attempts (methotrexate-zidovudine, followed by MNCOP-B), a rapidly fatal course occurred.

The introduction of HAART determined a profound modification of the evolution of HIV disease, but improved patient survival, persisting immune system abnormalities, and co-infection with potentially oncogenic viruses may be responsible for the increased incidence of neoplasms during the HAART era.[1–4] This phenomenon seems to extend beyond typical AIDS defining neoplasms, since other malignancies were reported with an incidence greater than that of the general population, and that of the pre-HAART era,[3 4] although they may be largely underestimated, owing to the unchanged CDC AIDS classification system. This trend is not uniform for Kaposi's sarcoma,[2 5] probably because of the favourable effects of antiretroviral-antiherpetic medications. The occurrence of dual AIDS associated malignancies remains exceptional: only two patients with a rare and aggressive non-Hodgkin's null cell lymphoma and prior Kaposi's sarcoma were described by Ascoli.[6] Although our patients developed "typical" AIDS defining neoplasms, this phenomenon may become of increasing concern, when

Table 1 Urethral gonorrhoea (UG)

	MSMs (n=92)	MSWs (n=86)	Total (n=178)	p Value
Mean age years (SD)	31.4 (7.3)	33.5 (11.3)	32.7 (9.8)	NS
White, n (%)	67 (73)	17 (20)	84 (47)	10^{-6}
Oral sex as the only risk factor for UG, n (%)	53 (58)	9 (10)	62 (35)	10^{-6}
HIV test positive, n (%)	30 (33)	3 (3.5)	33 (18.5)	10^{-6}
HIV test refusal, n (%)	8 (9)	5 (6)	13 (7)	NS
PPNG, n (%)	1 (1)	22 (26)	23 (13)	10^{-6}
NG pharynx, n (%)	13 (14)	5 (6)	18 (10)	0.06
NM pharynx, n (%)	18 (20)	5 (6)	23 (13)	10^{-2}

PPNG = penicillinase producing *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*; NG = *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*; NM = *Neisseria meningitidis*.

involving rare cancers. The increased life expectancy of HAART treated patients, a direct involvement of HIV itself, or abnormalities driven by oncogenic viruses, including EBV, HSV-8, and papillomavirus,[1 2] might explain the tendency to develop a broader spectrum of long term neoplastic complications. In our experience, a persistent HIV associated immunodeficiency and an incomplete virological response to HAART, possibly had a pathogenetic role. Clinicians should maintain an elevated clinical suspicion for a broad spectrum of HIV associated cancer, even after a first diagnosis of AIDS related neoplasm. Epidemiological studies should give a reliable estimate of the frequency of all HIV associated tumours, and recognise eventual dual AIDS associated cancers. The pathogenesis underlying AIDS related malignancies (especially neoplasm immunity and viral oncogenesis) deserve careful insight.

Contributors

RM collected and interpreted data and literature evidences, and drafted the entire work; LC collected clinical and laboratory data and literature evidences, and revised both data evaluation and discussion; FC proposed and supervised the report, read and corrected the draft, and participated in the discussion of both data and literature references

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Impact of the Sexually Transmitted Infections Foundation course on the knowledge of family planning nurses and doctors

There has been convergence of genitourinary medicine and reproductive healthcare services in the United Kingdom to produce "one stop sexual health clinics" such as the Sandyford Initiative in Glasgow.[1–3] As part of service development a number of educational initiatives such as the Sexually Transmitted Infection Foundation (STIF) course have been initiated to ensure that minimum skills and competencies are obtained. Training programmes such as the STIF course coordinated by the Medical Society for the Study of Venereal Diseases (MSSVD) play a vital part in providing staff with the education required to competently extend their roles. The first Scottish STIF course was run in Glasgow in March 2002. The course was developed as a UK-wide initiative to support the implementation of the English national strategy for sexual health and HIV.[4]

Table 1 The mean (SD), median precourse and post-course scores, and mean difference in scores

	Precourse score	Post-course score	Mean difference (95% CI)
All participants (n=18)			
Mean (SD)	8.2 (2.3)	10.7 (1.8)	+2.5 (1.1 to 3.9)
Median	9.0	12.0	
Doctors (n=15)			
Mean (SD)	8.6 (1.9)	10.6 (1.8)	+2.0 (0.7 to 3.3)
Median	9.0	12.0	
Nurses (n=3)			
Mean (SD)	6.0 (3.0)	11.0 (1.7)	+5.0 (–3.6 to 13.6)
Median	6.0	12.0	

In order to evaluate the impact attendance at the STIF course had on the knowledge of family planning staff, a prospective study was performed in Glasgow. Eighteen members of family planning staff (15 doctors and three nurses) were assessed on their knowledge of vaginal and cervical infections before and after attendance at the course, using four clinical case scenarios with accompanying clinical pictures. A maximum score of 12 was awarded for each assessment. The cases comprised candida, trichomonas, bacterial vaginosis, and chlamydia. The participants were asked to provide a provisional diagnosis based on the history and a clinical picture. The vaginal pH was then provided and each participant was given the opportunity to alter their diagnosis in the light of this additional information. They were then asked about the management of each condition. Within 3 months of the STIF course, each doctor and nurse were retested with the initial scenarios. Answers and feedback were provided on completion.

Two sample *t* tests and confidence intervals for the difference of two means were employed to compare all participants and the doctors and nurses scores before and after attendance at the STIF course. One sample *t* tests and confidence intervals for the difference of two means were employed to compare the doctors and nurses scores. As the numbers in the study were small a subanalysis of the results for different grades of doctors was not performed. Table 1 shows the mean (SD), median precourse and post-course scores, and mean difference in scores. The mean increases in all participants' and the doctors' scores were statistically significant ($p = 0.001$, and $p = 0.006$, respectively). The mean increase in the nurses' score was 5.0 (95% CI −3.6 to 13.6), however the number of nurse participants was small (n=3).

This study suggests that knowledge increased following attendance at the STIF course. Educational initiatives such as the STIF course are important tools for development of staff working in the field of sexual and reproductive health care. A larger study of this type assessing a wider range of subject matter with longer follow up would enable further evaluation of the STIF courses' impact on knowledge.

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Improving response rates for self collected urine samples

Chlamydia trachomatis is the commonest bacterial sexually transmitted infection (STI) in Victoria, Australia, with the number of notifications increasing threefold in the past 8 years from 1287 in 1994 to 3977 in 2001.[1] As infection with chlamydia is frequently asymptomatic, notification data underestimate population prevalence. Innovative study designs are necessary to investigate chlamydia prevalence and risk factors. We conducted a pilot study among women aged 18–32, to estimate the rate of response to a request to provide a mailed self collected urine specimen for chlamydia testing. Recruitment via mail was compared with recruitment via mail and follow up telephone contact.

Between March and May 2002, the names and addresses of 150 Victorian women aged 18–32 were randomly selected from the electoral roll. These were linked with the Electronic White Pages and telephone numbers obtained where possible, producing two groups: (1) women with telephone numbers identified, and (2) women without telephone numbers identified. All women were mailed a letter of invitation and an information leaflet. Women in group 2 were also mailed a reply paid participation form asking them to indicate whether they wished to participate.

Women in group 1 were telephoned after 1 week and consent sought to mail them a urine kit. Two reminder letters were sent to non-responders in group 2. Women testing positive